

DAPTION CAPENSIS.

Cape Petrel.

- Procellaria Capensis*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 822.—Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 213.—Gmel. edit. of Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 565.—List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 164.—Forst. Drawings, No. 96.
- Procellaria nævia*, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 146.—Ib. 8vo, tom. ii. p. 400.
- Le Petrel tacheté, ou le Damier*, Buff. Hist. des Ois., tom. ix. p. 304. pl. 21.—Ib. Pl. Enl., 964.—Forst. Voy., vol. i. p. 489.
- White- and Black-spotted Petrel*, Edw. Glean., pl. 90.
- Pintado Petrel*, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. vi. p. 401.—Damp. Voy., vol. iii. pl. in p. 96. fig. 1.—Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 178.
- Daption Capensis*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 241. pl. 28.—G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd edit., p. 98.
- Cape Pigeon and Cape Petrel of Voyagers.*

THIS species of Petrel is well known to every person who has voyaged to the Southern hemisphere; for it is equally common in the Atlantic and Pacific, and is nowhere more numerous than off the south coast of Van Diemen's Land; it may, in fact, be said to inhabit the temperate latitudes of all the seas above-mentioned; and to be without exception the most familiar species of Petrel the voyager meets with. From the circumstance of individuals which have been caught, marked, and again set at liberty, having been found to follow vessels for hundreds of miles for the sake of the offal thrown overboard, no doubt exists in my mind, that it constantly circumnavigates the globe. It is frequently seen close to the vessel, and if fed with any oily substance, it may during a calm be attracted to within three yards of the ship's side. It is at no time difficult to capture it with a hook, so that when other resources of amusement for the passengers fail, the capturing of this bird frequently affords them occupation for hours together, and often serves to wile away the time and break the monotony of a lengthened voyage. It is said to breed on Tristan d'Acunha and all similar islands; I did not myself fall in with any of its breeding-places, neither could I ascertain if it breeds on the Mewstone and other rocky islands off the south coast of Van Diemen's Land, in the neighbourhood of which we parted with a numerous flock, many of which had I believe followed us from the Cape of Good Hope. During my passage from Hobart Town to Sydney and from Sydney to Cape Horn, on my return to England, it was a constant attendant on the ship. The following notes were made during my passages out and home, and are worth transcribing, as they record some of the latitudes and longitudes in which the bird was seen, and the date of the observations:—

“July 27, 1838, lat. 26° 54' S., long. 31° 25' W.—Saw the first Cape Petrel, and from this date until we doubled the Cape of Good Hope it paid daily visits to the ship, sometimes in considerable numbers, at others only two or three appeared. Lieut. Blackett, R.N., informs me that it will follow ships from Cape Horn to Rio de Janeiro, and our Captain (McKellar) states, that he has known it to do so from the Cape of Good Hope to St. Helena. It is the Martin among the Petrels, being extremely tame, passing immediately under the stern and settling down close to the sides of the ship, if fat of any kind or other oily substance be thrown overboard. Swims lightly, but rarely exercises its natatorial powers except to procure food, in pursuit of which it occasionally dives for a moment or two. It flies both by night and by day, and nothing can be more graceful than its motions while on the wing, when the neck is drawn back, the legs, large as they are, are entirely hidden among the feathers of the under tail-coverts, and the tail expanded to its fullest extent. It is easily taken with a line and hook baited with any kind of fat, and when captured may be placed on the deck without risk of its escaping, as it cannot rise from a flat surface. Like the other Petrels, it ejects, when irritated, an oily fluid from its nostrils. It is the provider or rather the discoverer of food for the Albatroses, which masters of the seas may often be seen pouncing down among a flock of these fairy-like birds and dispersing them on all sides. Its note is a feeble squeaking cry. Its weight varies from fourteen to eighteen ounces: there is no difference in the weight of the sexes, neither is there any visible variation in their colouring, nor do they appear to be subject to any seasonal change.

“August 18.—Off the island of St. Paul's. Cape Petrels very plentiful.

“September 8.—Off King George's Sound. Cape Petrels still very numerous.

“May 6, 1840, lat. 40° S., long. 154° W.—Two Cape Petrels hovering round the ship, the first of the species seen since leaving Sydney.

“May 20.—Off Cape Horn, lat. 50° S., long. 90° W. Cape Petrels very abundant.”

Head, chin, back and sides of the neck, upper part of the back, lesser wing-coverts, edge of the under surface of the wing, and the primaries sooty brown; wing-coverts, back, and upper tail-coverts white, each feather tipped with sooty brown; basal half of the tail white, apical half sooty brown; under surface white; the under tail-coverts tipped with sooty brown; beneath the eye a small streak of white; bill blackish brown; irides and feet very dark brown.

The figures are of the natural size, and represent a wounded bird with its mate swimming by its side, as it is apt to do under such circumstances.